

**GREEN BROOK FLOOD CONTROL COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES**

LOCATION: Scotch Plains

DRAFT

DATE: October 3, 2018

MEETING CONVENED: 7:30PM

NOTE: Adequate notice of this meeting was provided informing the public of the time and place according to the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Law (Chapter 231, P.L. 1975).

IN ATTENDANCE:

Richard O'Connor - Engineer, GBFCC
Robert Greco . USACE
Mark Hardenburg . Piscataway
Theodore Bassman . Scotch Plains
Raymond S. Murray . GBFCC Chairman
Frank McArdle - North Plainfield

Paul Woska . Middlesex
John J. Sweeney - Middlesex
Pedro Estevez . Plainfield
Mark & Christine Lahey . South Plainfield
Alice Tempel . South Plainfield
George Ververides -Middlesex Cty Planning

MINUTES

The minutes from the August 2018 memorial service were approved. A copy of the approved minutes is available on the GBFCC website.

CORRESPONDENCE

None to be reported. Some internal emails & correspondence amongst team. The GBFCC maintains a correspondence file that is available for inspection as may be necessary and upon request.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Out-going bills to our consulting engineer Grotto Engineering, our secretary Tina Totten and our public relations firm Winning Strategies were examined by finance committee and found to be proper. Motion was made for bills to be paid. Motion carried.

This year, for the first time, all municipalities had paid by June!

Budget was presented for consideration at the December meeting. Note the overall expenditures are reduced by about \$500. Dues for the members, municipalities and counties remain the same as for the past several years.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Mr. Bassman and Mr. Sweeney will be the nominating committee for next year. An invitation was made for anyone interested in serving on the team to please let them know.

Reports:

ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS - Robert Greco, Project Manager.

Segment C-2, Contract 1: September 28th award for \$16.2 million to the low bidder, Carbro Construction. Carbro also recently completed segment B2.

The contract for pump station/culvert/levee by railroad tracks was supposed to be awarded first but we are having an issue with a property there. Real estate folks seem to think we will have access to that property in July of 2019. Will have plans and specs completed prior to that time frame. A second piece of property near segment C that should also be available July 2019.

Once we have those two properties, and if we have the additional \$24 - \$25 million in funding, then we can award all C-1, the levee/pump station/culvert, and start connecting all the pieces. Right now, we are only receiving \$5 million from the President's budget for FY2019. Have \$2 million in carry over because we saved money on the from Carbro contract which came in at \$16 million and we anticipated \$18 million.

Yesterday, the hydraulic engineer at Army Corp of Engineers, NY District brought to my attention that we must model this. We were supposed to start at railroad and work our way downstream. Need to be sure we are not inducing flooding. Once we determine impacts, may need to adjust.

Need NJ DEP Land Use Regulatory Permits in order to build project and if we are inducing flooding, we will not get the permits. That is the challenge. Marching forward as quickly as we can.

If we do not receive additional funding over the \$5 million for FY19, there will be no further construction contracts. We will be looking at the specs. Shortly awarding the contract for Geotechnical Investigations & Surveys along the Green Brook in Green Brook Township & Borough of Middlesex. Targeting October, November the latest. The package is ready. The carry over can be used on this.

Probably looking at a January to February time frame, when we can reach out to folks for Rights of Entry to access properties to take borings. We do have a history with property owners giving us trouble.

If we could receive \$24 million in FY2019, and additional \$25 million in annual increments thereafter, we should complete the whole Middlesex & Green Brook Township area up to Dunellen Borough by Warrentown Road by 2028, assuming there are not unforeseen issues.

Having Baltimore Real Estate district use the non-fed money to acquire real estate. They are making progress. Mr. Greco will send Mr. Murray a spreadsheet with details.

If we get \$40 million for a fiscal year - \$30 million fed/ \$10 million non-fed which is a 75%/ 25% cost share - NJ DEP cannot provide the full \$10 million this year. The max they can provide is \$7 million.

The USACE Resource Management office is looking at projects to review Fed vs non-Fed funds to make sure the cost share is in balance.

Mr. Murray says no need to shake up NJ for not providing enough until we know we are getting federal money. Currently NJ is providing more than Federal government.

Mr. Greco stresses the importance of keeping the cost sharing in balance in order to keep project moving forward.

Mr. Murray says the GBFCC will send a note to NJ DEP letting them know of our intention to seek out enough funds to get all of C-1 awarded, plus the option.

Preconstruction conference meeting with Carbro on October 17, 2018. Carbro is good to work with and have all the proper paperwork in order.

One more thing, looking at map regarding non-structurals, we have a group of five buildings in Piscataway Township where we will either raise the first floor or raise the utilities. Of the \$7 million non-federal money, giving \$5.25 million to real estate folks to use for real estate transactions. The remainder will hold back to award the design / build contract for the five structures in Piscataway township. Would like to do that in FY19.

E4 Sciences, our consulting firm, is working on designs for a group of structures in Green Brook Township. Looking at the new hydraulics for the area to see what needs to be done.

Having a meeting next week to discuss six structures in Bridgewater Township that had been slated for either raising first floor or raising utilities. Looking like the non-structural features on some of them, will be more costly than the buy-out, so we may have additional buyouts.

Question regarding Middlesex: I know you awarded that contract on C-2. Do you know when the shovels will hit the ground? Do you think it will be this year?

Mr. Greco states he will know more after the pre-construction meeting on October 17th. Carbro is usually anxious to get started, so he thinks they will want to start before the end of year. They will likely start right by that field, where it often floods.

Should see construction activity for the next few months, but that will not be Carbro, that will be CMS for the demolition of structures in that area.

House by bridge on South Lincoln Avenue is part of option 2. Need to put floodwall there. Problems with that house though as there are multiple liens so it will take more time.

The priority is, if we get the additional funding, to spend it on option 2. The second priority would be the C-1 floodwall. Third priority would be the award of contract over by railroad for pump station/culvert/levee. All assumes we can get the real estate in order.

Discussion continues on best practices for the order of work.

Question: What about the diner?

Mr. Greco states the diner is scheduled for demolition next month.

Mr. Hardenburg: I was driving down Route 27 and it looked to me like in the area near the diner, the floodwalls are higher than the road. Did I get that right? What is the plan for the road?

Mr. Greco explains that is correct. You want the floodwall higher than the road and you need a closure gate. Will be two closure gates eventually. The water will flow under the bridge and over the bridge.

Bound Brook - Segment R-2 pump station down by the R-2 levee. Inspection report completed. Will be released to NJ DEP tomorrow. If all okay with them, I will release to all. Part of the pump station settled. The ring wall has an expansion joint that has fallen out, exposing a gap. From the measurements, within last three years, it only moved an eighth of an inch. Will need some repairs. Going to need to request permission from HQUSACE to use project funds to make this repair.

Question: I don't understand the meaning of what you are saying. Is Bound Brook at risk?

Mr. Greco reassures that Bound Brook is not at risk. The inspectors found no problems other than the ring wall has moved slightly. Mr. Murray & Mr. Greco explain that the ring wall is essentially protecting the road from erosion, not protecting from water.

Upper Basin. Ongoing validation study to determine whether the Upper Basin is engineeringly feasible, economically justifiable, and environmentally acceptable. This includes the two detention basins and the channelization along the Plainfields. Need to reexamine that portion of the project. Next week will complete the Project Management Plan which is the schedule and funding. We had the draft version completed earlier this year, but NJ DEP looked at it. They said that the New England district, dam safety experts, need to look at it and make a risk assessment. They priced the cost of looking at the risk assessment for each of these dams as \$337,000 per dam.

NJ DEP does not think it makes sense to spend that much without knowing if the dams are even going to go through. We are now rearranging the schedule and pushing those tasks back.

Going to gather information to see what next steps should be. Will need input from NJ DEP and LURP, etc.

Will have to investigate possible alternatives if the detention basins are eliminated and the impact on the GRR. Since the project costs have ballooned out, reducing costs would be good. What can be revised or eliminated. Still need to have protection for the Plainfield area though.

In looking at all the Upper Basin possibilities, will look at the impact on the downstream areas. Will also look at the Stony Brook, and the features by the South Plainfield area by Spring Lake. Some plans we envisioned in 1997, may not be viable now.

QUESTIONS / COMMENTS FROM THE COUNTIES

Mr. Bassman inquiries about Scotch Plains being impacted if detention basins eliminated.

Mr. Greco responds that it will need to be investigated as part of the alternate solutions investigations. Discussion continued about the limited funding and how best to utilize the \$5 million which is allotted.

QUESTIONS FROM PUBLIC

Christine & Mark Lahey . Residents of Fred Allen Drive, South Plainfield. Alice Tempel told them about this meeting. They live in floodplain. In all the years that they have lived there, since 1982, she has yet to see anything that could have been done with our flood situation. Their concern now is about the Bound Brook flood gates and how it impacts them. All of their neighbors have been flooded multiple times, they had not. Until Hurricane Irene hit and then the water was high. It was also the first time they initiated the Bound Brook flood gates. Great thing for Bound Brook but seems that now I may be in position to have water directed at me.

On the news the next day, we heard that something was installed improperly on the flood gate, so it let go. The day it flooded, it also receded in 20 minutes, moving that much water, that fast. It was very unusual.

I also have a concern about the bridge near my house. I think it completely clogs the waterway there because it is too low. Needs to be elevated and widened. Bridge opening is maybe only 40 feet wide and it over-floods by 150 . 200 feet. All it takes is a branch to get stuck and there's a problem. I have never seen the streams get cleared out & checked for debris. We have taken many, many pictures of this happening.

Comments are made that South Plainfield would be responsible for this in cooperation with Middlesex County.

Mr. Greco assures the Laheys that all the projects are first modeled, by professional architect and engineering firms, to check for any induced flooding. The projects are thoroughly scrutinized by several entities.

Mr. Murray said that many similar questions were raised in this very building right after Irene. The people from Middlesex Borough that experienced flooding were particularly concerned that now these levees are in, we are experiencing flooding. The engineer for Somerset County, Joe Skupien, indicated that from where the people were to where the levees were in Bound Brook, there was an elevation change. From the top of the levee to the bottom of the stream where they were was 14 feet of difference. Basically, he said Bound Brook would have had to be under water by 14 feet over the levee before that would have happened to them in Middlesex Borough. You are that much further removed from the area. I think it was just a tremendous storm.

Green Brook Township had an exercise this past week with their Emergency Management team and we held a fake storm. Talked in very specific terms. The OEM coordinator is new to the position, although not new to emergency management and he started the exercise by asking everyone in the room "in a typical flood, what floods first?"+My response was it depends on a lot of things. Concentration . was it a sustained rain over long period of time or a quick burst of heavy rain. Tides - what is happening with tides? Is it specific to Green Brook or further East or West? All these different things play a big part in the time concentration. A storm like Irene, we saw it come up so quickly. In other storms, like a couple weeks ago, with a very heavy overnight rain but there was a completely different area of town where the roadway was in jeopardy of going under water. It was based on how the storm fell. There are a lot of factors that go into it. The levee system and floodwalls in Bound Brook are so far removed from South Plainfield are, I don't really think it could have had any impact on it.

Mr. Murray continued, I don't know about a floodwall giving way during Irene. Not sure what that is referring to.

Mr Greco: During Irene, the project in Bound Brook was not completed. The flooding came in from the NJ Transit railroad, by the Middle Brook.

Mr. Murray: There was not a failure of any of the gates. On the western portion of Bound Brook, where the project was not completed yet, the water was able to breach and come into Bound Brook.

Discussions continue with comments from several folks about the fears of future flooding, costs of flood insurance, the low bridges and the need for clearing of debris from streams/rivers. New housing developments throughout the municipalities that may be impacting drainage and saturation, as well as the topic of contaminations and of PCPs also is discussed.

Mr. O'Connor reminds that earlier we heard the Corp discuss working with their current funding, they would complete up to Middlesex Borough around 2028. The time frame to be out to South Plainfield is closer to 2047.

Mr. Murray reminds that if we get more funding sooner, that could accelerate to 2035.

He also makes suggestion about investigating FEMA flood mitigation programs, where you apply, it is a very long process, and there are different programs you can undertake. In Green Brook, we just received funding for our 2016 application. We applied for buyouts of three homes in Green Brook that were flood prone and FEMA approved those. Again, part of the issue is whether the property has filed insurance claims or not, and if the property is a repetitive loss or a severe repetitive loss. Assuming you are on one of those lists, there's the opportunity to apply for this grant. The way the grant process works is that FEMA makes the award to the township, the township gets an appraisal, if you are happy with the appraisal, the township buys your house. If you are not happy with the first appraisal, you pay for your own appraisal. If that appraisal is higher, but within 10% of the first appraisal, the government typically accepts your appraisal. If its more than 10% higher, they go to an independent party for an appraisal and that is the amount that becomes boss in the whole thing. At any point, you can back out. In the 2015 round, we were approved for 2 homes. One of them took the buyout; one decided to stay. In 2016, we applied for 3 buyouts. We were approved for all three.

There are other types of things you can do regarding elevating the structure and/or raising utilities. You have to show there is worthwhile financial benefit to the government.

Mrs. Lahey: We haven't made any insurance claims. Our entire family worked really hard to keep water away. We took dirt from around our house, put it into small garbage bags, and made a dam around our garage door.

Mr. Murray: Maybe the FEMA mitigation program may be worth it for some of the neighbors that have made insurance claims. There is a matching component of the program depending on whether you are a repetitive loss or a severe repetitive loss. In Somerset County we are fortunate that we can reach out to the county to absorb some of the match, but I don't know if Middlesex County has the same program. Blue Acres type program. Suggests the Laheys talk with their neighbors to see if its worth them approaching the borough.

Mr. O'Connor: I think South Plainfield just bought out what used to be Suburban Bus. I believe the grant money went for an extension from Belmont to Route 27. That seems to be where they are concentrating efforts.

Discussions continued regarding the Laheys' home flooding history, and their past experiences, as well as those of their neighbors.

Mr. Greco: I was contacted by National Public Radio, NPR, to be interviewed by an investigative reporter about the Green Brook project. He said people are unaware of the history of the project and how the project works. I advised the GBFCC, and Mr. Murray gave me insight as well. There is a great deal of information on the websites, and the regular meetings are open to public.

Discussion continued about the length of time portions of the project take.

Mr. O'Connor: This is an over-simplification, but we are about \$400 million to \$500 million into a more than a billion-dollar project that started in 1973. In many years the funding was a million dollars or less. The project can only move forward as money is readily made available. Even if someone was to open up flood gates, so to speak, and make money not an object, there is still

only so much money that can be spent in one year because of contractors and engineering that goes into it.

Mrs. Lahey says her son did an Eagle project in the area behind their house and she remembers Rob Greco's name.

Mr. Greco states he has been with the Corp since 1994.

Middlesex County

Mr. Ververides says they are continuing their work. Received a letter from DEP, regarding the culverts being proposed in Dunellen next to the Raritan Valley Line. I will share letter with Mr. Greco.

WINNING STRATEGIES .

Rob Zucker was not in attendance. Mr. Murray summarized his memo:

In the President's budget there was an allocation for projects of our type, that was about half of what was authorized in prior year. As such, our number, which we hoped to be higher, was cut to the \$5 million level. For projects like ours, there is about another \$85 million out on the street. We intend to go meet with our congressional delegation and the staffers, make a second trip to Washington, to persuade our legislators to help get more than our \$5 million allocated. As Mr. Greco mentioned, the \$5 million allocated will go to non-construction related activities and engineering items. Anything we can do to keep the construction moving is going to benefit in keeping the overall time down to finish the project. This also creates a sense of urgency in a year when there won't be any new construction projects. So, if there is \$85 million out there, we are going to ask for \$25 million of it. If we get a portion of that allocated our way, we can award the option on the contract from last week. Kudos for getting that contract out on Friday so it can be considered within this fiscal year.

Commissioner Hardenburg commented that on the evening of Sept 12th Somerset County practiced closing the flood gate under the railroad bridge. They did a very good job and went smoothly. There were several people on hand, so they could learn how it's done. Very impressed with all involved.

ANY FINAL QUESTIONS?

None.

Mr. Murray thanked all for coming and thanked Scotch Plains for their hospitality.

A motion was made and approved to adjourn.

MEETING ADJOURNED: 9:10 PM

Upcoming 2018 GBFCC meeting dates:

December 5 – Plainfield Library